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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses India's 1986 National Policy on Education and describes the policy's emphasis on the essential characteristics of a national educational system that provides opportunities for equal access to education irrespective of class, caste, creed, sex, or geographic location. The development of Indian education is featured, and the historical role of various Indian commissions in the design and synthesis of national educational policies is chronicled. This document suggests that the reasons for developing the new education policy may be more political than educational and that implementing it will be difficult because of the country's vastness, numerous social problems, and political unrest. (JHP)

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THE GENESIS OF THE 1986 NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION

BY

SURESH CHANDRA GHOSH

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THE GENESIS OF THE 1986 NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION

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In January 1985 the Government of India announced that "a new Education Policy" would be formulated soon. In August 1985 after making a careful assessment of the existing developments, the proposals were submitted to the public for a country-wide debate and discussion.[1] In May 1986 emerged the National Policy on Education after its approval by Parliament.[2]

The document on the National Policy on Education is divided into twelve parts. After some preliminary observations in the first two parts, it discusses in some detail about some of the essential characteristics of a national system of education providing opportunities for equal access to education to all, irrespective of class, caste, creed or sex and areas including backward, hilly and desert. It envisages a common educational structure like 10+2+3, a common core in the curricular programme at some level, an understanding of the

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1. Ministry of Education, Goct. of India, Challenge of Education - a policy perspective, New Delhi, 19 August 1985.

2. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, National Policy on Education - 1986, New Delhi, May 1986.

diverse socio-cultural systems of the people while motivating the younger generations for international co-operation and peaceful co-existence.[3]

"The New Policy" therefore, stresses the need for removal of disparities and emphasises the steps to be taken to equalise educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far - women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the handicapped and some minority groups who are either educationally deprived or backward. People belonging to rural areas, hill and desert districts, remote and inaccessible areas and islands need special care and incentives. "The whole Nation", observes the National Policy on Education, "must pledge itself to the eradication of illiteracy, particularly in the 15-35 age group."[4] The document seeks to organise programmes on adult education linked with national goals to enable the beneficiaries participate in the developmental programmes of the country.

While the local community will be fully involved in early childhood care and education, "the new thrust" in elementary education will be in (a) universal enrolment and retention upto 14 years and (b) attempt to substantially improve the quality

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3. Ibid.; p.3 et seq

4. Ibid.; p.9

of education. This effort will be fully co-ordinated with the network of non-formal system so that by 1990 all children attaining the age of 11 years will have had five years of schooling and by 1995 all children upto 14 years of age will be provided free and compulsory education. In secondary education talented children should be provided opportunities to proceed at a faster pace by means of pace-setting schools with full scope for innovation and experimentation. Courses on vocational education will ordinarily be provided after the secondary stage, but keeping the scheme flexible, these may also be made available after class VIII. Vocational education will be a distinct stream, intended to prepare students for identified occupations spanning several areas of activity. By 1990 vocational courses should cover 10 per cent and by 1995, 25 per cent of the higher secondary students. In higher education the most urgent need is "to protect the system" consisting of 150 universities and 5000 colleges from "degradation". Autonomous colleges will be developed to gradually replace the affiliating system while the creation of autonomous departments within universities on a selective basis will be encouraged. Research in Science and Technology and inter-disciplinary research in Social Sciences as well as setting up of national research facilities with proper forms of autonomous management will be encouraged. The opern university system will be initiated in order to augment opportunities for higher education while rural university to

transform rural India on the lines of Mahatma Gandhi's revolutionary ideas on education will be set up. Technical and Management Education curricula will be targetted on current as well as the projected needs of industry or user system and will relate to the changes in the economy, social environment, and knowledge. Delinking degrees from jobs will be made in selected areas where candidates despite being equipped for a given job are unable to get it because of an unnecessary preference for graduate candidates.[5]

The document makes a series of observations on cultural perspective, value education, languages, books and libraries, media and educational technology, work experience, education and environment, mathematics teaching, science education, sports and physical education, the role of youth and proposes to re-cast the examination system so as to ensure a method of assessment that is a valid and reliable measure of student development and a powerful instrument for teaching and learning.[6] Since these and may other "new tasks" of education cannot be performed in "a state of disorder" the first task is to make the system "work". "All teachers should teach and all students study."[7]

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5. Ibid.; p.10 et seq

6. Ibid.; p.20 et seq

7. Ibid.; p.20

The strategy of the New Education Policy in this respect consists of (a) better deal to teachers with greater accountability; (b) provision of improved students' services and insistence on observance of acceptable norms of behaviour; (c) provision of better facilties to institutions; and (d) creation of a system of performance appraisals of institutions according to standards and norms set at the National or State levels.[8]

How this system is going to be imanaged? Since Education is a concurrent subject now as per the Constitutional Amendment of 1976, it is expected a meaningful partnership will be ensued between the states and the Union Government in managing it. The guiding considerations will be (a) evolving a long term planning and management perspective of education and its integration with the country's development and manpower needs; (b) decentralisation and the creation of a spirit of autonomy for educational institutions; (c) giving pre-eminence to people's involvement, including association of non-government agencies and voluntary effort; (d) inducting more women in the planning and management of education and finally (e) establishing the principle of accountability in relation to given objectives and norms.[9] As far as the financial aspect of the system is concerned, the Government proposes to gradually increase the expenditure on

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8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.; p.26

education till it "uniformly exceed to 6 per cent of the National Income". Additional sources, to the extent possible will be raised partly by mobilising donations from the beneficiary communities and partly by raising fees at the higher levels of education while effecting some saving by the efficient use of facilities. And finally, implementation of the various parameters of "the New Policy" will be reviewed "every five years".[10]

Reviewing of educational policy "every five years" was a decision taken by the British Government as a sequel to the Report of the Indian Education Commission, 1882 and was first implemented in 1886[11], exactly hundred years ago from the date of the promulgation of the New Education Policy. While this aspect of the New Education Policy is not certainly new, the question may now be asked how new are the contents of the New Education Policy? The answer to the question can only be provided by reviewing the past developments in education and for this purpose we need not go beyond 1947 - the year when India achieved her independence. India's educational policy, immediately after her independence, was based on the structure provided by Sir John Sargent, Educational Adviser to the British Government, in his Post-War Plan of Educational Development in India in 1944. The object of the Plan

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10. Ibid.; p.28 et seq

11. See S.C. Ghosh, Indian Nationalism, New Delhi, 1985, p.183.

was to achieve for India in 1984 the same educational standard as it had then existed in England. It provided for the liquidation of illiteracy, universal elementary education and higher education for one student out of every 20 that completed the secondary school and a certain amount of vocational, technical and professional education. It also provided for compulsory physical education, milk and mid day meals for undernourished children and special education for the physically and mentally handicapped.[12]

However, within three years after the Sargent Plan, India earned her freedom and the people were in no mood to accept a system of a highly selected secondary and higher education as well as the long period of 40 years for its implementation. In January 1948 in his inaugural address to the All India Educational Conference convened by the Union Education Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, observed: "Whenever conferences were called to form a plan for education in India, the tendency, as a rule, was to maintain the existing system with slight modifications. This must not happen now. Great changes have taken place in the country and the educational system must also be in keeping with them. The entire basis of education must be revolutionised".[13]

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12. John Sargent, Post-War Plan of Educational Development in India, 1944-84, New Delhi, 1944

13. S. Gopal, ed., Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, New Delhi, 1987, Vol.5, p.407.

Nehru's observation was quite in keeping with the forces of the time which saw emergent nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America pre-occupied with the task of renovating their educational structures to suit national needs and national aspirations. But the promised revolution in education system in India was not so easy to materialise. India after independence was plagued with a host of pressing problems. The Partition had brought to India refugees from East and West Pakistan - they had to be rehabilitated. The Princely states had to be integrated with the Indian Union. The bureaucracy and the army had to be reorganised as the departure of British officials had left these services depleted. India had to be granted a constitution and made a republic. Plans had to be drawn up for developing the country. In the midst of all these the utmost that could be done in education was to appoint in 1948 a University Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan as reconstruction of university education was thought to be essential to meet the demand for scientific, technical and other manpower needed for the socio-economic development of the country.

The recommendations of the Commission in 1949 were wide ____ covering all aspects of university education in India. They emphasised the 10+2 structure at the pre-university stage, correction of the "extreme specialisation" in the courses, development of research to advance the frontiers of knowledge

and of professional education in agriculture, commerce, law, medicine, education, science and technology including certain new areas such as business and public administration and industrial relations and suggested reform of the examination system by assessment of the student's work throughout the year and introduction of courses on the central problems of the philosophy of religion. They also emphasised the importance of student's welfare by means of scholarships and stipends, hostel, library and medical facilities and suggested that they should be familiar with three languages - the regional, federal and English - at the university stage and that English be replaced as early as possible by an Indian language. The Commission was also seized with the idea of setting up of rural universities to meet the need of rural reconstruction in industry, agriculture and various walks of life. The universities should be constituted as autonomous bodies to meet the new responsibilities, a Central University Grants Commission be established for allocating grants and finally university education be placed in the concurrent List.[14]

One of the most significant recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Commission was on the reorganization of secondary education as a pre-requisite condition for the development of university education and so in 1952 the Secondary Education Commission was appointed under the Chairmanship of Dr. A.L.

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14. See Report of the Radhakrishnan Commission, New Delhi, 1949

Mudaliar. The Commission which submitted its report in 1953 reduced the total duration of the school course from 12 to 11 years and transferred the control of secondary school leaving examination from the universities to the specially constituted Boards of Secondary Education. While developing the curricula of the higher secondary course, the Commission sought to diversify it by the establishment of multipurpose schools which would provide terminal courses in technology, commerce, agriculture, fine arts and home science. The obvious object was to divert students from university education into different walks of life according to their aptitudes and capabilities.[15]

It is clear from the above that the Mudaliar Commission as well as the Radhakrishnan Commission which met before it dealt exclusively with two areas of education in which the ruling elite groups were interested. Both these sections received large allocations of funds[16] and underwent rapid, unplanned and uncontrolled expansion, resulting in deterioration of standards and creation of severe problems of educated unemployment. On the other hand, the programmes of adult education and liquidation of illiteracy continued to be neglected as in the past. In elementary education the evils of wastage and stagnation continued unabated

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15. See Report of the Mudaliar Commission, New Delhi, 1953.

16. For details about expenditure in education in the successive Five Year Plans, see Table III C in J.P. Naik, Some Aspects of Post-Independence Development in India, Sambalpur, 1974, pp.60-61.

as no structural changes like multiple entry or part-time education were introduced. A perfunctory attempt at introducing basic education on Gandhian ideas was made but it was not successful and practically given up soon. In the context of all these developments, the constitution provision of free and compulsory education for all children upto 14 years of age by 1960 seemed a distant dream now.

It is also clear from the earlier developments in education that the country was only interested in retaining the colonial set-up and was mostly engaged in dealing with education in a piece-meal fashion. The vision of a national system of education seen in 1947 thus got blurred within two decades. Yet, the demand by the electrorates for such a system continued to be made so persistently that in 1964, M.C. Chagla, the Union Education Minister appointed the Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari, to advise the Government on the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all its aspects so that a national system of education could emerge.

In 1966 the Commission in its voluminous report suggested a drastic reconstruction, almost a revolution, in education to meet the problems facing the country in different sectors. It suggested an internal transformation in education to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people, a qualitative

improvement to raise its standards and a quantitative expansion of educational facilities on the basis of manpower needs and equalization of educational opportunities. The internal transformation could be achieved by making science education an integral part of all school education and improving its teaching at the university stage. Similarly, work experience should be an integral part of all general education. Vocational education was emphasised both at the lower (11-16 years) and the higher (17-18 years) secondary stage while in higher education about one-third of the total enrolment was expected to be in vocational courses. A common school system with equality of access to children from all social strata was suggested and some from of social service on students at all stages was made obligatory. Development of fundamental social, moral and spiritual values including a provision for giving some instruction about the different religions was emphasised. National consciousness as well as a sense of belonging to the country was sought to be promoted through the adoption of a curricular programme which was both dynamic and elastic at all stages. While retaining the three language formula of the Radhakrishnan Commission with some modifications, the Kothari Commission recommended the development of all modern Indian languages for use in education as well as in administration in their respective states. While all the three languages should be studied at the lower, only two of these will be compulsory at the higher secondary stage.

The qualitative improvement could be achieved by a maximum utilisation of the existing facilities. Since resources for upgrading all the institutions were not available, the Commission suggested that at least ten per cent of them should be upgraded to adequate standards during the next ten years ----- the model would be one secondary school in every community development block, one college in each district and five or six universities at the national level. The Commission accepted 10+2 at the secondary and the higher secondary stage followed by a first degree course of a duration of not less than three years. The Commission also made various recommendations including uniform pay-scales to improve the service conditions of teachers so the best persons coming out from the education system could be attracted to teaching. The Commission felt the education facilities could be expanded on a selective basis at the secondary and the higher secondary stage while effective primary education should be provided to all. Adult illitracy should be liquidated on a mass or selected scale and part-time courses of about one year's duration for the drop-outs in the 11-14 years age group. The Commission visualised that total enrolment would rise from 70 million in 1965 to 170 million in 1985, educational expenditure from Rs.6,000 million in 1965 to Rs.47,000 million in 1985, representing an increase in the proportion of national income devoted to education from 2.9 per cent in 1965 to 6 per cent in 1985.[17]

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17. For details, see Report of the Kothari Commission, published later as Education and National Development, New Delhi, 1970.

Since education was then a state subject, the usual procedure would have been to refer those recommendations concerning states to them but the public demand for the education was so great that the Government of India decided to depart from the procedure earlier followed. After a wide circulation through its own organs and the press, the Government referred them to a Committee of Members of Parliament for consideration. The recommendations along with the report of the Parliamentary Committee were then discussed in both the Houses of Parliament, followed by a discussion in the Cabinet. Out of these, discussions emerged the first national policy in independent India in the form of a resolution on education in July 1968.[18] Needless to say, the recommendations of the Kothari Commission were progressively diluted at every stage of the discussions. Yet the policy that was born out of them remained the basic framework for all governmental action despite an attempt made by the Janata Government to revise it in 1979 when it came to power in 1977[19] till the coming of "the New Education Policy" in May 1986.

How new is this New Education Policy? It is interesting to note that the framers of the New Education Policy have never cared to answer this question. They have never bothered to explain anywhere in the long policy statement in what sense the

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18. J.P. Naik, The Education Commission and After, New Delhi, 1982, Chapter III National Policy on Education (1968), pp.39-44

19. Ibid.; Appendix III, Draft National Policy on Education (1979) pp. 213-226.

present policy is new or how different it is from the 1968 policy resolution. A comparative study of the New Education Policy with that of the 1968 National Policy on Education reveals that the former has directly borrowed many of its ideas from the recommendations of the Kothari Commission which provided the basis for the 1968 National Policy on Education. In some places there are also direct acknowledgement of its indebtedness to the 1968 policy. For example, on the subject of the languages which always remains one of the most sensitive issues in any education policy in India, the New Education Policy observes: "The Education Policy of 1968 had examined the question of the development of languages in great detail; its essential provision can hardly be improved upon and are as relevant as today."[20] Similarly on the subject of raising resources or making investments in education, the New Education Policy says: "The National Policy on Education, 1968, had laid down that investment on education be gradually increased to reach a level of expenditure of 6 per cent of the National Income as early as possible..... It will be ensured that from the Eighth Five Year Plan onwards it will uniformly exceed to 6 per cent of the National Income."[21]

The New Education Policy thus does not appear to be new in many aspects of its policy. Its indebtedness goes beyond the 1968 National Policy on Education, as for example, the idea of

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20. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, National Policy on Education, 1986, New Delhi, May 1986, p.21

21. Ibid., p.29.

setting up rural universities is directly taken from the Radhakrishnan Commission of 1948-49.[22] It may be mentioned here that the subject of model school or pace setting school of the New Education Policy which has been seen as undesirably favouring a privileged few against many students by its critiques is not a new concept at all. The idea of model school is older than the education system itself which emerged in Modern India in 1854 it is an idea which first found favour with James Thomson, the Lt. Governor of the North Western Provinces, in 1849, when he decided to introduce a scheme of vernacular education by means of a school in every village and every district to remove the appaling ignorance of the people in understanding the new revenue settlement in the North Western Provinces. The scheme was successful - it was extended to the rest of British India before it finally became a part of the plan of the Education Despatch of 1854.[23] Similarly the idea of autonomous colleges which has been in the air since the days of the Kothari Commission and is now an important aspect of the new policy is also older than the structure of the Indian education system itself. Colleges like the Hindu College, Sanskrit College, Agra College, Delhi College and the Presidency College which grew out of the Senior Department of the Hindu College in 1853

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22. Ibid., p.29

23. See S.C. Ghosh, Dalhousie in India, 1848-56, New Delhi, 1975, p.3 et seq

were all autonomous colleges. They were brought under the ju jurisdiction of the Education Department which emerged in 1855[24] and were later affiliated with the three universities that came into existence at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857.[25]

If the New Education Policy is not "new" in themes and ideas, it is certainly "new" in the emphasis it has placed on its implementation and the directions it has issued for the purpose. Immediately after its approval in the Budget Session in 1986, a Programme of Action was prepared and presented for approval in the Monsoon Session of the Parliament. The 1968 National Policy on Education was taken so half heartedly and its implementation was made so casually that a decade after the policy had been promulgated, J.P. Naik, a Member-Secretary of the Kothari Commission, was led to remark: "The stresses and strains of the (education) system have continued to grow so that the educational scene in the country in 1978 is not certainly better and is probably a little more complicated and difficult than in 1966".[26] It is also new in the way it has emerged. The 1968 policy was based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission which took nearly two years to

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24. J.P. Naik and S.C. Ghosh, eds., Development of Educational Service, 1855-1879, New Delhi, 1977. Introduction

25. See Papers connected with the establishment of universities in India, 1857, Calcutta, 1857

26. Observation made in a mimeographed paper on "The Enunciation of the National Policy on Education" (1968), p.55, copy of which lent to me by Late Shri J.P. Naik in 1978

finalise them. Whereas the formulation of the proposals of the New Education Policy was not preceded by the appointment of an expert Commission on the subject. The proposals were formulated by the concerned Ministry officials under guidance from the ruling party immediately after its coming to power in December 1984/January 1985 with a massive majority in Parliament. They were ready by August 1985 and were then submitted to the politicians, academicians and administrators for their reactions. Out of the discussions that followed the final policy emerged in May 1986 - the shortest possible time that has everyone into the making of a policy in education while the first announcement of such a policy on the subject, Indian Educational Policy on 11 March 1904, took nearly three years after the proposals were first mooted in a secret Conference at Simla in September 1901.[27]

There is always a secret part to the making of a policy and since the secret files of the Government are not open to us, it is difficult to say at this stage how the proposals for the New Education Policy came to be formulated. Yet from a study of the developments that had taken place in India in the last three decades as well as from a careful study of some of the observations made in the 1986 policy documents, it is

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27. See S.C. Ghosh, Indian Nationalism, New Delhi, 1985.

possible to guess that the reasons for promulgating the New Education Policy are more political than educational. In the past few decades the education scene has been in turmoil in most of the developing countries which have recently emerged independent but in India it has a peculiar dimension because of the vastness of the country with a huge, almost exploding population now, who speak different languages, follow different religions and cultures, and practise different social norms and behaviours. Since early 1950s a Planning Commission has been set up to chalk out a planned development of India and education has become a part of the planned programme. Unfortunately it has not received the attention it deserves "whether in absolute terms or relatively to investment in other sectors",[28] and the Planning Commission has never bothered to develop educational programmes after a careful assessment of the educational needs of the country. Since education is a catalyst in one's development, everybody asks for it and the political party which seeks its mandate from the public to rule has normally accepted such demand. The result is within three decades after independence we have a tremendous but unplanned expansion of education, particularly in higher education which is too academic in nature. For example, in 1947, there were only 19 universities, 277 Arts and Science Colleges, 199 intermediate colleges and 140 colleges of professional and

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28. Total educational expenditures represented about 3 per cent of the national income in 1974. See J.P. Naik, Policy and Performance in Indian Education, (1947-74), New Delhi, 1975, pp.15-6.

technical education ------ in 1974, there were 100 universities and about 4,000 colleges. The enrolments in higher education which stood at 2.5 lakhs in 1947 were now estimated at 34 lakhs.[29]

What was the prospect open to these educated youngmen and women whose parents made investment in their education? The Indian economy did not in those years expand sufficiently to absorb the output of an unplanned expansion in education. Most of them remained unemployed or under employed. In 1974 the Registar of the Directorate General of Employment and Training reveals that there were some 54.58 per cent educated unemployed at the matriculation, 26.01 per cent at the undergraduate, 17.87 per cent at the graduate and 1.53 per cent at the post-graduate levels. In other words out of a total population of nearly 600 million, approximately 4174,000 remained unemployed.[30] Under employment and unemployment which may differ in their consequences for individuals have many social consequences in common, especially the monopolizing of issues of social conflict in the political arena. The incidence of unemployment among the educated added to the stresses of the society already suffering from communalism, casteism, linguism and sectionalism. What could be the attitude of these young educated unemployed towards

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29. J.P. Naik and S. Nurullah, A Students' History of Education in India, Delhi, 1974, p.434

30. See the Register of DGE&T, New Delhi, for 1974.

the government that had helped them to get education but no employment after it? It is one of discontent, as Bacon's Of Seditions and Troubles observes that one of the chief causes of discontent is "when more are bred scholars than preferment can take off."[31] This also saps student motivation, creates unrest on the campus, and leads to further deterioration of standards. As a matter of fact, higher education converts on a large scale, the uneducated under employment or unemployment, which is mute, unorganised, and without a nuisance value into educated, urban unemployment which is vocal and organised and has a great nuisance value.[32]

And what could be the attitude of the government towards them? One which could possibly best be described in words used by Curzon in 1901 more than hundred years ago which commenting on the spread of English education in India since 1835: "When Erasmus was reproached with having laid the egg from which came forth the Reformation, 'Yes', he replied: 'But I laid a hen's egg, and Luther had hatched a fighting cock'."[33]

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31. Quoted in S.C. Ghosh, Indian Nationalism, New Delhi, 1985, p.21.

32. J.P. Narayan, Education for our People, New Delhi, 1978 p.51.

33. See S.C. Ghosh, Indian Nationalism, New Delhi, 1985, p.22

It is not, therefore, surprising to see that the educated unemployed spilled into the political arena. Many regional political parties began to exploit the discontent of the educated unemployed against the government to strengthen their grip over the people while leadership and recruits as cadre members of the Naxalities and other radical groups in Indian politics came largely from the ranks of the educated unemployed.[34] Until 1967 the Congress Party held power both at the Centre and in States but since 1967 elections it not only began to loose its hold over the states, particularly in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Tripura, Andhra, Karnataka, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Assam and Haryana but also mauled itself by a split in 1969. Also new political parties have emerged demanding the creation of separate states for them such as Uttarakhand in the Uttar Pradesh, Gorkhaland in West Bengal, and Jharkhand in parts of Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh which have posed a serious challenge to the government at the Centre. However, it is the militants' demand in the Punjab of a State fully independent of India in the form of Khalistan that has taxed the nerves of the Centre to the utmost and the government has to pull all its resources to fight these forces of disintegration.[35] In all these developments when the involvement of the educated, both employed and unemployed has

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34. See T.N. Dhar, A.S. and W.F. Ilchman, Education and Employment in India, Calcutta, 1976, p.115

35. Newpapers form the chief source for this information but for a consolidated account for a particular year, see Times of India Year Book published at Bombay.

been quite large, there has been no evidence of patriotism, no sense of belonging to one country and even no recollection of the past sufferings and sacrifices of their ancestors for the freedom of the motherland. If seems they have not got the correct education since independence and the government therefore is determined to introduce an education policy which while contributing to the national development will rectify these defects. As the document on National Policy on Education, 1986 observes in the concluding part of its Introductory: "India's political and social life is passing through a phase which poses the danger of erosion to long - accepted values. The goals of secularism, socialism, democracy and professional ethics are coming under strain. The rural areas, with poor infrastructure and social services, will not get the benefit of trained and educated youth, unless rural-urban disparities are reduced and dtermined measures are taken to promote diversification and dispersal of employment opportunities. The growth of our population needs to be brought down significantly over the coming decades..... Besides, a variety of new challenges and social needs make it imperative for the Government to formulate and implement a new education policy for the country. Nothing short of this will meet the situation".[36]

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36. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, National Policy on Education - 1986, pp.2-3

The same sentiment is also echoed by Programme of Action when it observes: "Time is of essence, and unless we act now, we stand in the danger of once again missing the opportunity of educational refor, so critical not only for the development of our nation, but for our very survival."[37]

What is the prospect of success for this new National Policy on Education? In Part XII of the document it speaks highly of the prospect it visualises: "..... given our tradition which has almost always put a high premium on intellectual and spiritual attainment, we are bound to succeed in achieving our objectives."[38] However, the success of such a scheme in a democratic country like India with many political parties at least hold similar or common views on the subject of education. Unfortunately, this is not the case and there is a feeling in the states with non-Congress governments that some of the programmes in the New Education Policy like model schools, autonomous colleges, open university, de-linking degrees will further widen the gulf between the rich and the poor, the privileged few and the non-privileged many, the haves and the haves-not. Already some Marxist teachers organisations in India have begun to view the New Education Policy with suspicion

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37. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, Programme of Action, New Delhi, August 1986, p.IV

38. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Goct. of India, National Policy on Education - 1986, p.29.

and distrust. The recent month long university and college teachers' strike on the subject of the revision of teachers' salaries has further added cynicism to suspicion and distrust.

If the political parties in India fail to hold similar or common views on the New Education Policy, it still has chances of success provided the party that frames it rules both at the Centre and in the states and is assured of its return to power in succeeding elections. But this is, not only the case now as there are many non-Congress governments in the states but also seems to be a remote possibility. In the Assembly Elections between 1985-1986 non-Congress governments were returned to power in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Karnataka, West Bengal and Tripura. In Tamil Nadu the Congress was able to share power with AIADMK but in Haryana, a traditional seat of power of the Congress, it was badly mauled by Devi Lal's Lok Dal. The corruption charges in the country's defence deals involving high Congress dignitaries and government officials which have begun to surface in the media since June 1987 has considerably eroded the image and credibility of the ruling party at the Centre and there are now frequent demands from the opposition parties for a Mid-term Poll.[39]

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39. Again daily newspapers for the past months form the chief source for the information.

In view of the facts stated above, the prospect of the New Education Policy does not appear to be very bright at the moment despite the fact the government is pumping huge amount of money in implementing some of its programmes like operation blacboards, open university and teachers training. The only way out seems to be a Central Act embodying all the proposals of the New Education Policy and binding upon all governments, present and future, both at the Centre and in the states. If this is not done immediately, the fate of the New Education Policy will not be much different from the 1968 National Policy on Education. Let us hope that Nostradamus' prediction about the end of the world by 1999[40] proves wrong and the New Education Policy 1986 helps us to land in India of the Twenty-first Century smoothly without any broken limbs!.

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40. For an interesting account of Nostradamus (Michel De Nostradamus) Sixteenth Century French Physician Astrologer, most of whose predictions have come true, see The Occult by Colin Wilson.